

Economic Development Advisory Council

6.25.14 Meeting minutes

Americana Room – Hampshire Hills

Present:

Matt Ciardelli, Ciardelli Fuel Co
Chris Costantino, Milford Conservation Commission
Mark Fougere, Board of Selectmen
Wendy Hunt, Milford Improvement Team
Heather Leach, First Colebrook Bank
John McCormack, TIFD
Penny Seaver, Bean Seaver & Smith
Dale White, Leighton A White, Inc.

Excused:

Michael Brisebois, Hitchiner Mfg Co
Lyle Fulkerson, HPM Insurance
John Siergiewicz, Hollis Line Machine
Sean Trombly, Trombly Gardens
Janet Langdell, Planning Board

Bill Parker, Director Community Development
Shirley Wilson, Recording secretary

M. Ciardelli called the meeting to order at 7:30AM.

Minutes:

D. White made a motion to accept the minutes from 5/21/14 as submitted.

Update on the UNH Business Retention and Expansion Program:

M. Ciardelli said a handful of participants met at the Chamber of Commerce to begin the program which will benefit Amherst and Milford. We discussed the multi-year implementation, some of the processes and how to get more participation from Amherst as they were not represented at that initial meeting. We will meet again on Monday 6/30/14 at 4pm. P. Seaver explained that this is a flagship program and Milford and Amherst will be the first group in the state going through the program. UNH will provide guidance, support and training. Also, we did offer Dale's name as committee chair. B. Parker listed the attendees from EDAC: Penny, Wendy, Matt, and Lyle. This program will consist of visitation to local businesses with a survey that the leadership team puts together to see what the issues are. We haven't seen the survey questions yet, but UNH will help develop the quick fixes and also help with a long range plan to retain businesses. He was anxious to see what the survey will consist of and discussion on the questions ensued. M. Ciardelli said it's all about communication; to find out about the challenges of doing business here and bringing that information back to the town at the Planning Board or Selectmen's level. P. Seaver noted that because of the Policies and Procedures group, we were able to bring knowledge of this process to the representatives and to the discussion. Many of the issues that EDAC has been discussing, like infrastructure and utilities were brought up, so we will have a good base to move this forward. J. McCormack added that maybe we could build on our accomplishments and past feedback. M. Ciardelli said Andre Garron, of UNH is very confident about what the program can do and brought up the fact that we may also benefit by affiliating ourselves with UNH and their logo. Business leaders wouldn't see this as coming directly from the Town. J. McCormack said it can be valuable to build on that association or alignment. M. Ciardelli said the program is looking for a commitment from us for people/foot soldiers who will go out to businesses to collect data for the survey, and we did offer up EDAC members. B. Parker said Jim O'Mara was going to try to coordinate this for Amherst, but there hasn't been much follow up. H. Leach said since she now has an Amherst business address, she would be willing to be an Amherst representative. There was further discussion as to how to get Amherst coordinated and more involved.

D. White said we're very progressive in Milford and he gets nothing but positive feedback, even though there may have been some negative experiences. Businesses really appreciate the EDAC group and the fact that there are people that care, so we have been influential. B. Parker said that point was made at the meeting regarding a town in the Midwest where businesses commented that this was the first time anyone ever talked to them. M. Fougere said when this was originally done in Milford twenty plus years ago, businesses were hesitant but several issues, both large and small, were brought to the Selectmen. M. Ciardelli said there will be good representation from Milford and we will keep the Board up to date.

Community Development Director – Sign Regulations in the Zoning Ordinance

B. Parker stated that in our sign regulations, there is a prohibition against banners, flags, balloons and temporary signage that people put out. It is a very difficult thing to enforce, but could also possibly be considered anti-business. In the last week, we've had some complaints from citizens about the banners and flags around town. We have to follow up on those complaints, so when we contact one business, they say I will take mine down, but what about the other businesses and it starts to snowball. I sent twelve (12) friendly letters asking businesses to take their signs down and to communicate with the Planning Board. I am looking to see if EDAC would support an effort from the business community to amend the sign regulations and if we can facilitate discussion and a compromise. Also, maybe some questions pertaining to signage could go out with the BR&E survey. Just driving around town, one can notice that all types of businesses have temporary signs, A-frames and small reader boards out. M. Fougere said it's a balancing act because it's important for a business to get their name out, but do we want plazas with thirty (30) signs out front? The regulations have to be written in a reasonable way and a lengthy discussion ensued. C. Costantino asked if anyone has found a good sign ordinance out there. M. Fougere commented that sign ordinances are a nightmare. B. Parker said we amend our ordinance annually and we brought this to the Planning Board last year, but they were anti-change. Maybe the Board would be more receptive if it came from the business community instead of staff. J. McCormack asked if any other communities were contacted to see how they handle these types of things. B. Parker noted that would be a good place to start. W. Hunt commented that she wouldn't have known there was an ordinance at all, when she passed some of the businesses along the main roads in town and they can be hazardous from a safety standpoint. B. Parker reiterated that temporary signs are difficult to enforce and are a low priority. M. Fougere said he's in favor of doing something. H. Leach said she agrees with putting something on the questionnaire because Amherst must have the same issues and there is a benefit to being consistent. D. White said it is good to hear that Bill is reaching out to the businesses. B. Parker added that in conversation with Dave Hammer regarding his signs, Dave was invited to join this group.

Status of Finalization of Community Economic Development Survey

H. Leach said Bill and Chris offered to help, but it is still unpacked in a box; however, one of the biggest things that came out of the EDAC survey was that everybody's idea of growth and development is so dramatically different. Development and growth have varied meanings from one person to the next and Amherst must face the same challenges.

Community Development updates:

- Cumberland Farms; construction is underway.
- The Fieldstone Building; turned out really nice. It is such an improvement over what was there before and it is an excellent example of the West Elm Street Gateway Overlay District and what the Town would like to see in new development.
- St. Joseph's/Milford Medical Center; turned in building plans and moving through the permit process.
- Dollar General; going before the Planning Board next month and trying to work out architectural issues.
- Possible residential subdivisions off West St and possible 40 lot subdivision off Mile Slip and Boynton Hill.
- DTN Auto Repair looking to relocate on Elm St and will go before the Planning Board.
- B. Parker will follow up on the Hollow Oak poultry processing plant.

Other Business:

H. Leach said that while she was trying to decide about her recent employment change, she was in contact with many business and professional people in the surrounding areas of Nashua, Bedford and Manchester. Several things surprised her about other people's impression of Milford. From a retail perspective, when people look at disposable income and the kind of people that they would like to service, the impression is that there's a wild difference between being next to Walmart in Amherst and being in Milford in front of Shaws when there is only a two mile difference. People from outside of this area don't look at the Souhegan Valley. They look at the demographics of Amherst versus the demographics of Milford and we need to be cognizant of that. This comes from people who are only ten to fifteen miles out and who could be advising businesses where to go, so we need to promote Milford more regionally. H. Leach added that she was pleased to see Mr. Norwood state that we have something to promote with a lower paid workforce here because that is the flip side to that same number. D. White said Milford is the hub; you have to go through Milford to get anywhere. J. McCormack said that is a good point because we also draw from communities like Hollis and Brookline that are perceived as having higher per capita income. Maybe a question of *Who or where do you draw from* could be included on the BR&E survey.

We can reinforce the fact that we do draw from other communities instead of just have a high number of rental units. D. White said Milford is a blue collar town, but people come here to do their business and to eat breakfast, lunch and supper; that is what we are. H. Leach noted that Hampshire Hills and Giorgio's draw from a fifteen mile radius with some of the highest per capita incomes in the state, but people from Bedford and Nashua don't get that and they are the ones who sometimes decide where a company's resources go. D. White said that the catch 22; it's the Planning Board's job to raise the bar with aesthetics like the Fieldstone Building and Dollar General but there is a fine balance with what you can tell people what to do before they walk. H. Leach said we all think of Milford as the hub, but need to do a better job of talking that up in our promotional efforts. Another thing that came up in discussion on multiple occasions with other bankers, was the heroin issue in Milford. M. Fougere said it is a huge New England issue, but he's not sure if the information out there is accurate. H. Leach said the police are actively working on this problem but it comes up Rte 13 so we are unfortunately the hub for that too. J. McCormack said Pepperell MA faces the same issue and a brief discussion followed. H. Leach also noted that the positive side to this is that everyone she spoke with was in agreement that the quality of life is far better out here than in Nashua. She just wanted us to be aware of these images of Milford when we go out to promote Milford. C. Costantino asked how can we change the perception. W. Hunt said we're small enough to provide the services but our police department can still be personal.

D. White said the Water & Sewer Commissioners at their meeting last night, gave the approval for Dave to start the process for the west end water extension. We will get an engineer's estimate and put a package out with real pricing prior to town meeting. It will give the citizens something to vote for and it will also provide a real number for a contractor. Support from the EDAC will be very important, but the real issue will be how do we fund this. What can we do to promote this in a positive way? There is a need for expansion and it will have to be done prior to the corridor improvements. M. Fougere asked if you reached out to any businesses or groups to come up with a betterment charge? D. White said no, but many of those businesses have water issues and might be willing to contribute. J. McCormack said once you have the numbers, then you'll be able to move forward with both the businesses and the voters. D. White said any offset to the cost will help. D. White said it is a win/win for the Town and for fire suppression.

M. Fougere said the Selectmen are in the process of putting together an RFP for engineering services for the gravel area on the Brox property. It will be a two phase approach for the RFP which will provide information for the voters and then obtain state permitting for the gravel. H. Leach said we will need to educate the voters on the whole picture and show that there is a balance. D. White said it will also be important to earmark where the money goes and be very clear on how it is spent and what the benefit is. There is a perception right now that nothing is being done with the Emerson Rd intersection and South St improvements and people are asking how and where that money is going to be spent. B. Parker clarified that no funding has been lost and the newspaper article had some inaccuracies. Money for the Emerson Rd project has been delayed and the South St project is moving ahead; we had a public information session yesterday afternoon with the abutters and we are meeting the deadlines. D. White said it is important for people to get all the information.

Membership

B. Parker said David Hammer will try to join us at the next meeting.

The next meeting will be scheduled at a future date.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:40AM